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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE  
Washington 25, D. C.

FIELD MEMORANDUM SCS #1129

Re: Travel Policies

June 15, 1949

TO ALL RANKING FIELD OFFICERS:

In view of the passage of Public Law 92, 81st Congress, approved June 9, 1949, increasing (effective July 1, 1949) the maximum per diem and mileage rates allowable, it is believed appropriate to re-state at this time the travel policies of the Soil Conservation Service.

The tangible benefit that is expected to actually result from proposed travel is to be carefully reviewed by each administrative official requiring or authorizing trips to be made. Administrative officials must accept their responsibility of seeing that there is no laxity in the control of travel as this could bring unfavorable criticism and otherwise work to the detriment of the important program the Service is carrying out.

Supervising officials who require or allow trips are to review and sign the resulting expense vouchers in the space for the "Supervising Official", in order to indicate their recommendation for approval of the expense incurred in the travel as performed. A brief general statement indicating the nature of the official duties performed should be included on all travel vouchers.

The issuance of general fiscal year travel authorizations should be strictly limited to cases where such authorizations are absolutely necessary. This type of authorization should ordinarily be issued only to employees who make frequent trips or trips on extremely short notice. Where such individuals could work as efficiently under specific trip authorizations, general authorizations should not be used.

Rates of per diem are to be based uniformly on the actual cost of the official travel to the employee. The official authorizing travel should consider the scope and type of travel which will be performed and determine the average rate which will cover the traveler's actual expenses. Any change in the scope or type of travel which might cause a variation in the cost of the travel should be accompanied by an amendment changing the per diem rate.

In fixing per diem rates in each case, full consideration should be given to factual information supplied by the prospective traveler as well as other supporting data.

In estimating the cost of proposed travel in order to determine the proper rate of per diem to allow, the right of the employee to reasonable first-class living accommodations should not be questioned.

Per diem must not be used as a device to augment the salary paid the employee.

Budgetary considerations should not be allowed to influence the rate of per diem to be paid. The only justifiable influence of budgetary considerations in connection with travel is on the amount of travel to be performed.

The rank or salary rating of an employee must not be used as the determinative factor on which a per diem rate is based.

The main points to be considered in determining per diem rates are variation in the cost of first-class living accommodations between different localities, or variation in cost due to differences in the lengths of assignments in the same locality.

Generally speaking, the cost of first-class accommodations is higher in metropolitan than in rural areas (including small cities and towns in the term "rural areas"), and this fact should be taken into consideration in determining per diem rates. During certain seasons, accommodations in resort towns regardless of size may be disproportionately high. These and other local variations soon become known to travelers and form the basis of experience on which local travel costs may be fairly estimated. The rate of per diem to be allowed should be based on the estimated proportion of the period in travel status which will be spent in localities falling within each established cost class of subsistence as shown in the proposed itinerary.

There may be variations in the same locality in the costs to travelers based on differences in the place or nature of each traveler's official business in that locality. If so, these differences should be recognized and allowance made in the per diem rates.

Ordinarily, where a period of assignment at a point of duty will be in excess of 30 days, consideration should be given to reducing the per diem rate after such period of time as it is believed that lower costs of subsistence may be obtained due to availability of weekly and monthly rates. However, where prevailing conditions do not permit this it is proper to allow the original rate to continue in effect.

When an employee is to be assigned to a point of duty for a period that may reasonably be determined to continue with only minor interruptions for as long as four months, he should be officially transferred to that point as his new official headquarters rather than sent there in travel status unless it is definitely determined that the stay is in fact only temporary and he will return to his former post of duty.

Per diem will be paid in accordance with the Standardized Government Travel Regulations except that for travel wholly within a calendar day where departure is after 6:00 A.M. only one-fourth of one day's per diem will be allowed and that only when return to official headquarters is at or after 8:00 P.M. For travel wholly within a day where departure from headquarters is at or before 6:00 A.M. and return is at or after 8:00 P.M., per diem will be allowed in accordance with the Standardized Government Travel Regulations. Where travel is wholly within a calendar day and return to headquarters is before 8:00 P.M. no per diem will be allowed. The only exceptions to this ruling are those specifically granted hereafter under the signature of the Chief of the Service.

While travel generally is performed by common carrier or Government automobile, whichever is more suitable, there are instances where it is more advantageous to the Government to authorize travel by privately-owned vehicle with reimbursement to the employee on a mileage basis. In such instances a mileage rate (within the maximum rate allowable) should be authorized which will adequately reimburse the traveler for his operating expenses and depreciation of his vehicle. Occasionally an employee, for personal reasons, may wish to perform an official trip in a privately-owned car. If considered desirable he may be authorized to do so and may be allowed a straight mileage rate. However, since an advantage to the Government must be present in cases where a straight mileage is allowed, a lower rate in such instances would usually be indicated. Consideration should also be given to extra driving time affecting per diem and annual leave charges.

This memorandum supersedes my unnumbered memorandum of May 1, 1942, and Field Memorandum SCS #1119.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "H. H. Bennett", is written in a cursive style.

Chief



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